

## Protecting Californians from Secondhand Smoke at Work

### Overview:

With the historic passage of California's Smoke-Free Workplace law ([Labor Code Section 6404.5](#)) in 1995, California led the way in protecting workers from secondhand smoke. In recent years, however, California has fallen behind. Twenty-five states and the District of Columbia are considered [100% smoke-free](#) by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), but California is not one of them.

One reason is that exemptions and loopholes in California's Smoke-Free Workplace Law continue to expose the employees and patrons of many businesses to the harmful effects of secondhand smoke. And the groups who are disproportionately affected — young adults, Hispanics and low-income workers — are also often those who can least afford it.

Reducing health disparities is both a public health priority and a community responsibility. California workers deserve equal protection under the law and should not have to jeopardize their health to make a living.

### The Facts:

#### **There is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke.**

- Secondhand smoke contains at least [250 chemicals](#) known to be toxic and/or cause cancer, including formaldehyde, benzene, vinyl chloride, arsenic, ammonia, and hydrogen cyanide. [Learn more.](#)
- According to the [U.S. Surgeon General](#), ventilation systems cannot protect nonsmokers from secondhand smoke. [Learn more.](#)
- Secondhand hookah smoke contains the same cancer-causing chemicals found in secondhand smoke from cigarettes. [Learn more.](#)

#### **One in seven California workers report secondhand smoke exposure at work.**

- Employees and patrons of certain businesses continue to be exposed to the toxic effects of secondhand smoke, even indoors, due to exemptions and loopholes in California's Smoke-Free Workplace law. [Learn more.](#)
- Unequal worker protection places young adults, Hispanics and low-income workers at higher risk of harm from secondhand smoke.
- Workers in hospitality, service and blue-collar jobs are also more likely to be unprotected.



## **What Needs to be Done:**

The U.S. Surgeon General has found that approaches such as separate smoking rooms and air ventilation systems do not eliminate exposure to secondhand smoke. The only way to protect people from breathing secondhand smoke indoors is to require all workplaces and public places to be smoke-free.

[Research](#) shows that smoke-free policies and regulations do not have a negative impact on business revenues. Establishing smoke-free workplaces is the simplest and [most cost effective](#) way to improve employee and employer health.

Legislation is required to remove the exemptions in Labor Code Section 6404.5 and increase protection from secondhand smoke for California workers. Previous legislation has faced little, if any, opposition from business groups including the tobacco industry, but all sides must come together to ensure that, in the future, all California workers have the protection they deserve.